

Sunday 28th February 2021 – Why are we here?
To take up our cross and follow Jesus



WELCOME AND NOTICES

CALL TO WORSHIP

‘For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mark 10:45).

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

SONG: HOW GREAT THOU ART

<https://youtu.be/tWuNgOP1i0w>

O Lord my God! when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed:

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze.

Then sings my soul...

And when I think that God His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die—I scarce can take it in.
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin:

Then sings my soul...

**When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home—what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, my God, how great Thou art!**

Then sings my soul...

OPENING PRAYER AND CONFESSION

Lord and Father, we come rejoicing in your goodness to us in Christ, that you sent your Son to die so that we might live. How great Thou art!

How great Thou art

We confess our sinfulness before the mercy of our Heavenly Father.

Lord, you are steadfast in your love and infinite in your mercy; you welcome sinners and invite them to be your guests. We confess our sins, trusting in you to forgive us.

We have yielded to temptation and sinned:
Lord, have mercy
Lord, have mercy

We have turned from our neighbours in their need:
Christ, have mercy
Christ, have mercy

We have resisted your Word in our hearts:
Lord, have mercy
Lord, have mercy

May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and keep us in life eternal. **Amen.**

SONG: HOW CAN I BE FREE FROM SIN

<https://youtu.be/FQrdW6L3mKQ>

How can I be free from sin?
Lead me to the cross of Jesus.
From the guilt, the power, the pain?
Lead me to the cross of Jesus.
There's no other way,
No price that I could pay;
Simply to the cross I cling.
This is all I need, this is all I plead,
That His blood was shed for me.

How can I know peace within?
Lead me to the cross of Jesus.
Sing a song of joy again!
Lead me to the cross of Jesus.
Flowing from above,
All-forgiving love
From the Father's heart to me!
What a gift of grace –
His own righteousness
Clothing me in purity!

How can I live day by day?
Lead me to the cross of Jesus.
Following His narrow way?
Lead me to the cross of Jesus.

READING: MARK 8:27-38

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, 'Who do people say I am?'

²⁸ They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' ²⁹ 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah.' ³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life^(a) will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.'

This is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

REFLECTION: WHY ARE WE HERE? (2)

To take up our cross and follow Jesus

A senior church leader said early in my ministry, 'The most difficult aspect of your ministry will be managing expectations; the expectations of those in your church and the expectations of people in the

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wider community, as well as your own expectations.' Wise words.

So, what were the first century Jewish expectations of the Messiah? They expected someone who would liberate them from Roman occupation, someone like Judas Maccabeus who rebelled against Greek rule. They expected someone who would put Jerusalem, and specifically the Temple, at the heart of their Messianic ministry. Would Jesus meet their expectations?

This passage marks the middle of Mark's gospel. It is the tuning point and from here all events move towards Jerusalem and to the cross. The text centres around the disciple's expectations of Jesus as Messiah. We have Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah and Jesus' response, teaching what it meant for him to be Messiah. This passage also explains what it means for us to be identified with him as his disciples, so we can be clear about what expectations Jesus has of us.

Jesus starts the conversation in this text when he asks, 'Who do people say I am?' (v27). It's a good starting question but then makes it more personal by asking 'But what about you. Who do you say I am?' (v29). It's all very well discovering what others think, but we need to be confident in what we ourselves think and believe. Here Peter answers for himself and all the disciples when he says 'You are the Christ' (v29). 'Christ' is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word 'Messiah', which means 'Anointed One.' It wasn't Jesus' surname, it was his title. In identifying Jesus as the Messiah, Peter was saying that the one who would overthrow Israel's enemies, regather all God's people from the ends of the earth, and make Jerusalem the centre of the world, establishing the perfect reign

of God, this one whom all Israel had been waiting for, he had finally arrived. This is what people expected from the Messiah. They did not expect a suffering Messiah.

Which is why when Jesus said to his disciples that 'the Son of Man must suffer many things.. be killed and... rise again' (v31), Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. This wasn't in the script. The language here suggests Peter is saying to Jesus that he hadn't quite understood the Messiah role.

But having rebuked Jesus, now it was Peter's turn to be rebuked, and what a stinging rebuke it was: "Get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (v33). In trying to defend Jesus, Peter had become the unwitting mouthpiece from hell. Why did the disciples reject the notion of a suffering Messiah? Because they still had in mind the wrong idea of how Messiah Jesus would achieve his goal of winning our salvation. But Jesus had a different vision.

Jesus knew the path which lay ahead and could see that it would lead to the cross, to suffering and death. There was no other way to bring about the salvation which people needed. Only God would design a plan for people's rescue from death by choosing to die. That's why Israel misinterpreted the Scriptures that told of a suffering Messiah. Even Jesus' own disciples couldn't see through their expectations the words of Isaiah, when he said,

'He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. ⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken

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by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:3-5).

If we are to confess Christ, we must also embrace a suffering Messiah. Now this may be easier to do this side of the cross, after his death and resurrection, but there is more that is required of us. We must embrace his model for living, and this is not so easy.

Confessing Christ means we must follow him to crucifixion. Mark tells us, 'Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (v34). Let's be clear about Jesus' own expectations, the cross is for all who would follow him.

People often speak about having a 'cross to bear.' They usually mean a difficult situation like illness, grief or redundancy, or a difficult person, such as a demanding boss or a critical in-law. But this is not the cross we bear. No, the cross we bear comes from walking in Christ's footsteps and embracing his life in ours. Bearing your cross is more about the difficulties you face because you follow Christ and walk in his way. Our crosses come from and are proportionate to our dedication to Christ. Difficulties in life are not an indication of cross-bearing, but difficulties for Christ's sake are. When we go through difficult times because we are following Christ, then we can say that we are carrying our cross.

Last week I shared about going to Canada in 2003 and experiencing open heaven. However, that was only half the story.

What happened after that was like walking through hell when at the next church meeting I shared what Christ had showed me for the church. The vision I'd had concerned children in the church and the faces that had scowled in the vision were now scowling in front of me. One by one church members sitting next to each other stood up and denounced me. It was as though Satan was going along the line of seating. I sat there wondering what on earth was going on. I was confused because this was unlike any church meeting I'd ever been part of. It felt evil, and not just because the denunciations were aimed at me. It was arranged for my Moderator to meet the church members. He then came to me and said, "You have three months to change things, otherwise I will ask you to leave." I couldn't believe it. I wondered what God was up to.

It was a very difficult and isolating time for us as a family, one of the most painful times of my life, but every time I prayed the Lord kept on saying to me 'persevere.' Three months later the Moderator came to see me and reluctantly said I could stay as it seemed things were looking more settled. But I knew I was on his radar, and any mistakes would cost me the pastorate.

Six months later an African pastor was visiting, as she had done the previous year, and Revd Janet asked about the church. I shared what had happened and she burst into laughter. I asked what was so funny as it was still painful to me. Her reply has stayed with me. "In my country the opposition comes from outside, from the authorities, but in the UK opposition comes from within the church. Didn't you know that? Of course you were going to have opposition. God had just given you the vision for your church in a powerful way and Satan wanted you out." I stayed as

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minister of the church for a further four years before moving. I had heard God speak to persevere, so I did. Our crosses are proportionate to our dedication to Christ.

The second effect of confessing Christ is the paradox of the cross-bearing life. "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it" (v35). It is a fundamental law of life in Christ, losers are keepers and keepers are losers. We live in an age that says, 'look after number one. Save yourself. Live for yourself.' That is the way to lose in this life and lose for eternity.

Whitney Houston was the most celebrated singer of her time, and the most awarded female singer of all time. The words of her song 'Didn't we almost have it all' summed up her life. She had the world at her feet but died alone, drowning in a bath in a hotel room in 2012. She almost had it all but in fact she had nothing in the end.

Growing up in New Jersey and attending New Hope Baptist Church, she would have heard today's text many a time. In the words of another of her songs, 'I have nothing, nothing, nothing, if I don't have you' is true when seek to save our lives and when we don't have Jesus. We can have everything and yet nothing if we don't have Jesus. That's why it's vital not only for us but for all people to heed Jesus' call to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him.

So, in conclusion, we are firstly to confess Christ, the suffering Messiah who went to the cross for our salvation. And secondly his call means we are to take up our cross and follow him. It is embracing the paradox that losers and keepers. We must embrace the life he calls us to, which means losing

our lives for him and the gospel. In losing our lives for him, we gain our very soul.

How can we confess Christ in today's climate of covid and secularism? We have to firstly admit that there is a God-shaped hole in the heart of every person, whether they are aware of it or not. And only Christ can fill that hole. Secondly, we must understand that covid has put questions of life and death into the forefront of people's minds. So, rather than being a more difficult time, it is a good time to speak of the saving grace of God in Christ. We can point people to Jesus by making sure we ourselves are taking up our cross and following him. A people on fire with love for Christ and willing to sacrifice themselves for Christ's sake will be noticed.

Let's pray.

INTERCESSIONS

Lord Jesus, we confess you as our Lord, and we choose to take up our cross and follow you. Help us in our sufferings and trials and strengthen us in our weakness.

Suffering Lord
Hear our prayer

We pray for those who are following you in difficult parts of the world. We pray for Christians persecuted for their faith, that the testimony of their lives may be a witness to their persecutors.

Suffering Lord
Hear our prayer

We pray for the powerless and all victims of injustice and cruelty, for those in war zones and places of famine, and for

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refugees and asylum seekers, that justice and peace may be theirs.

Suffering Lord

Hear our prayer

We pray for the powerful and influential, and for all who govern the nations. Give them wisdom from above and care for the people they are called to serve.

Suffering Lord

Hear our prayer

We pray for the afflicted and sorrowful and for all who need our prayers. We pray again for Robert as he recovers from surgery, and for all in need of care.

Suffering Lord

Hear our prayer

We pray for the world in which we live, which has been ravaged by our greed and carelessness. Give us the wisdom to truly care for the world you have placed us within, its waters and wildlife, its wildernesses and urban places.

Suffering Lord

Hear our prayer

We remember before you those who have passed from this life into the light and peace of your presence, and we pray for those who mourn, that they would find comfort in you.

Suffering Lord

Hear our prayer

And all these things we pray, along with all our prayers throughout this week, in the name of Jesus our suffering Lord. **Amen.**

SONG: I WILL SING THE WONDROUS STORY

<https://youtu.be/d53bmgpiEws>

I will sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me;
How He left His home in glory
For the cross on Calvary.
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me;
Sing it with the saints in glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.

I was lost but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray;
Raised me up and gently led me
Back into the narrow way.
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me.
Sing it with the saints in glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.

Days of darkness still come o'er me;
Sorrow's paths I often tread,
But the Saviour still is with me,
By His hand I'm safely led.
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me.
Sing it with the saints in glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.

He will keep me till the river
Rolls its waters at my feet,
Then He'll bear me safely over,
Where the loved ones I shall meet.
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me.
Sing it with the saints in glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.



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HOLY COMMUNION (Methodist)

In Christ, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through his blood which was shed on the cross.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Blessing and praise belong to you, gracious and eternal God. Through your living Word you created all things, the majesty of the heavens and the glory of the earth. In your wisdom and goodness you have made all people in your image and likeness.

Therefore with saints and angels and with all creation we lift up our voices to proclaim the glory of your name:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of Your glory,
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of
the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy and gracious God, we give you thanks and praise that in the fulness of time you gave your only Son to share our human nature and to be tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin; to set his face resolutely towards Jerusalem and to be lifted high upon the cross, that he might draw to all creation to himself.

When the hour of his glory came, and loving his own until the end, he sat with them at supper, took bread and, after giving thanks to you, he broke it and gave it his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat. This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way he took the cup after supper, saying, 'Drink from this, all of you; this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

**Dying, you destroyed our death.
Rising, you restored our life.
Lord Jesus, come in glory.**

In obedience to his command we recall his suffering and death, his resurrection and ascension, and we look for his coming in glory. Send your Holy Spirit that these gifts of bread and wine may be for us the body and blood of Christ.

In union with Christ's offering for us, we offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice. Unite us in love and peace with all your people until, with the whole company of heaven, we are brought into the presence of your eternal glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Through him, with him, and in him, in the
unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and
glory are yours, almighty Father, now
and for ever. Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth as in heaven
Give us today our daily bread.**

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Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory
are yours now and for ever. Amen.

THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

The bread we break is a sharing in the
body of Christ.
Christ is the Bread of Life.

The cup we take is a sharing in the blood
of Christ.
Christ is the true vine.

THE SHARING OF THE BREAD AND WINE

Receive this holy sacrament of the body
and blood of Christ and feed on the Lamb
of God with reverence and faith.

The body of Christ broken for you. **Amen.**
The blood of Christ shed for you. **Amen.**

**Gracious God, we thank you that you
have nourished us with the bread of life
and with the cup of salvation. May we
who have received this sacrament be
strengthened in your service; we who
have sung your praises live in your glory;
and we who have known of your love see
you face to face in your kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

SONG: WHAT GRACE IS MINE <https://youtu.be/yazxxkbSkZE>

**What grace is mine,
that he who dwells in endless light
called through the night
to find my distant soul,
and from the scars
poured mercy that would plead for me,
that I might live
and in his name be known?**

*So I will go wherever he is calling me.
I lose my life to find my life in him.
I give my all
to gain the hope that never dies.
I bow my heart,
take up my cross and follow him.*

**What grace is mine
To know his breath alive in me?
Beneath his wings,
my wakened soul may soar.
All fear can flee,
for death's dark night is overcome:
My saviour lives
and reigns forever more.**

*So I will go wherever he is calling me.
I lose my life to find my life in him.
I give my all
to gain the hope that never dies.
I bow my heart,
take up my cross and follow him.
I bow my heart,
take up my cross and follow him.*

CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

The God of all grace who has called you to
eternal glory in Christ, make you perfect,
confirming and strengthening you; and to
him be the power for ever and ever. **Amen.**

And the blessing of Almighty God, the
Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, bless
you and keep you, now and always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.